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ABSTRACT

Considerations in conducting attitude surveys concerning bilingual education are discussed. An introductory section examines briefly the history of the controversy over bilingual education, legislative initiatives, and some previous opinion research. Specific kinds of information needs relating to public opinion are then noted and problems arising in such research are described. Two central issues examined are: (1) the need for comparable data that reflects opinions of local subpopulations as well as those of the larger population, and (2) elimination of bias in presentation of results, including accurate representation of their statistical significance. It is concluded that reliable information about community opinions, especially as to where and how much they differ from official, internal school district policy, is essential for successful program planning, development, and implementation. Definitions of common terms in bilingual education are appended, and a 54-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Issues in Conducting Surveys regarding Public Opinion toward Bilingual Education

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> We have room but for one language here and that is the English Language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans of American nationality and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding-house.
>
> -Theodore Roosevelt

"Language has always been at the center of scholarly and theological debates about the very definition of humanness" (Hakuta, 1986, p. 3). Bilingual education is at the center of debate today. It is a method of teaching academic subjects to a non-native speaker of the dominant language. In America this includes, to a greater or lesser degree, the use of the "home language" as well as English. There is a variety of methods and philosophies within bilingual education itself.

"Sometimes criticized as a modern innovation, a concession to pressure groups, or an education frill, [bilingual education] has a long and honorable history in this country and abroad" (Cazden, 1990, p. 9). There is no unanimity of opinion among experts, though, as to the general acceptance or the willingness of the public or government to support multilingualism either now or in our country's past (Zelasko, 1991).

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Even in face of the recurring presence and tremendous influence of a national agenda concerning bilingual education, "the historical legacy concerning [home] language instruction . . . comes from *local initiatives* [italics added]" (Perlmann, 1990, p. 28).

In an important study of opinion toward bilingual education, David O. Sears and Leonie Huddy (1984, 1990) found a strong racial component to this debate. Even critics of bilingual education infer this when noting, wrongly, that "bilingual education began as an offshoot of the civil rights movement" (Banks, 1990, p. 62). As the volume and the intensity of the debate increase, one can sense that America is now experiencing an era similar to those that have produced dramatic changes in bilingual education in the past. There have been pivotal periods where racial tension was played out in the arena of this language debate (Hakuta, 1986) — whether that conflict be overwhelming of native populations on this continent, revolution against the British at our nation's beginning, discrimination and assaults against the Chinese in the mid 1800s, anti-German hatred after World War I, or the manifestations of legal and physical confrontations with Blacks in the 1960s. All these describe a particular pattern of contempt for "other" ethnic populations and groups, the outcomes of which have been changes in attitude — for good or for ill — toward non-English speakers and their rights.

What is common to these conflicts is the interplay of local controversy with a regionally or nationally imposed resolution

(accompanied by authoritative rhetoric sometimes at odds with the beliefs of the local entities). This, then, produces local repercussions. We are now in the midst of such a dynamic.

The issue of "other language" policy an important one since, by all counts, there is need for educational support of some type for what Congress estimated to be 3.6 million limited English proficient (LEP) students (O'Malley cited in Hakuta, 1986, p. 222) — with other estimates from 1.5 to 7.5 million (Did You Know, undated) and 6.6 million by the National Association of Bilingual Educators (Waggoner in Hakuta, p. 222). More enlightening than these numbers is the InterAmerica Research Associates study which predicts an increase of 35% in the number of limited-English proficient (LEP) students across the country by the year 2000 (Oxford cited in Hakuta, p. 224). In California, for example, non-Anglos will be the majority as early as 1994 (Walters, 1992b) with projections of 7.2 million by 2005 and 14-16% of those being LEP (Gold, 1991b). This shift is affecting schools. A poll by the California Teachers Association found white voters in the state less supportive of public schools than non-whites (Hakuta, 1986).

Less than 20% of California voters have children in public schools. The State is facing devastating fiscal problems and a down-turn in growth (Walters, 1992a). There is a push for a statewide initiative to put on the ballot "parental choice" of a child's school of attendance, fleeing ethnically diverse public schools. The influence and demands of parents are being felt by government.

California is an accelerated microcosm of the country, leading in the ascending numbers and percentages of the non-white population (Gold, 1991). The state's demography and its educational plan for non-English speakers indicates that it may well be a bellweather for America (Walters, 1992b). California stresses the importance of parent participation (California Department of Education, 1990) in determining local goals and strategies for their attainment. The state's Educational Code specifies strong parental involvement in directing a school district's instructional programs, particularly those addressing the needs of special populations. One such population is non-native speakers of English. Section 52176 of the Code requires the creation of parent advisory committees and lists those committees' duties (West's, 1991, §52176 (a), (b)). In its attempt to serve all non-English or limited-English speakers in the state, the California Department of Education has developed an assessment procedure — the English Language Assessment Program (ELAP) — to determine compliance with state standards. One section of the review investigates parent input to the district. This is achieved through the interview of just one parent of a district committee (California Department of Education, 1991). Passage of the state's Proposition 98 (1988) provided another mechanism for testing the level, intensity, and effectiveness of parent participation in decision-making at the school site. This has given a further boost to both formal and informal parent organizations.

Nationally, the influence of such parent groups has grown of late. Examples are manifold, including the bitter Chicago School Board conflict with parents, the Oakland School District refusal to adopt state-approved textbooks because of parent objections, the proposed evolution from "student-centered" education to "family-focused" service delivery (Early Intervention, 1990), California's school restructuring, and Proposition 98's "accountability report card." Local initiative is on the rise again, and local groups within educational entities are asserting their power. Given the means and the opportunity they will re-emerge as strong players in instructional issues such as bilingual education. In such a climate, it is incumbent upon school and district leadership to be aware of the opinions of these various groups.

A U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission discrimination complaint and lawsuit were filed against a South San Francisco employer contesting an English-only rule on the job (EEOC Upholds, 1991). A high-visibility State Senate Bill 834 was designed to respond to that case would have allowed employees to use non-English languages at the workplace. The bill was passed by the California legislature but vetoed by the Governor in 1991. Generally across the country the public does not understand the meaning or purpose of bilingual education, and those who know it most favor it least (Sears & Huddy, 1987; Zelasko, 1991). The perennial "English as the Official Language Bill (H.R. 123, S. 434) still appears in the

federal legislatures. Bilingual education, suffering from misunderstanding and unstable support, seems destined to be the expendable object of debate.

Opinion surveys are one form of descriptive educational research that provides teachers and administrators with information on what a certain population feels about a particular issue. Will such research done on a nationwide or statewide level reflect opinions of a local school or district toward bilingual education? And, what are the differences in opinion among the various sub-groups within a school or a district on this particular issue? That difference may be more meaningful than a difference between that district and a national "norm".

To gain perspective on the consensus (or its lack) within an educational entity such as a school district, administrators must have a tool and a method for determining opinion. It would be of advantage to have an accurate assessment of not only the existence of such opinion but also to know if that opinion contains any significant mismatch among the entity's component subgroups.

Saint Thomas Aquinas noted that, "To know something that comprises many things without proper knowledge of each thing contained in it is to know that thing confusedly" (cited in Hutchins, 1952, p. 455).

When districts or schools release results of any type of study, whether a report on student achievement scores or making public the results of a parent survey, readers automatically make comparisons on their own between groups and among questions. It is natural to want to do so — out of curiosity, as a way to validate ones own opinion, or to create an informal, personalized "baseline" of "normal" opinion. When a school district conducts its own opinion survey, data may be organized in tables, graphs, or charts for public consumption. Even if extreme numerical differences occur in these presentations, those differences may not reflect actual statistically significant differences (Isabell, 1990; Gay, 1987). In district surveys and studies it is often left up to the reader to determine what is meant by these reports. This approach allows information to be wrongly assessed and evaluated.

What is also problematic is the proposition that a piece of opinion research in bilingual education done with a nationwide or even a statewide sample produces "norms" or generalizations that may not relate directly to those who populate the local district or school. In this way an impressive looking piece of literature on how people feel toward bilingual education by respected researchers may draw teachers' and administrators' attention but may be of little use because it does not accurately reflect the views of those around them.

If it is important that a school or a district know how its local populations (parents, staff, administration, etc.) feel about an issue,

then it is important that the organization survey that population and make an accurate analysis of obtained data. This would include a meaningful analysis for significant difference of opinion among the groups, because these differences reflect areas of potential conflict. Unfortunately that is not routinely done, though the procedure is neither difficult nor inaccessible.

The last two decades have seen conflicts between white majority and African, Asian, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern minorities — an indication that a crucial period is also now at hand. The increase in hate crimes, ethnic-targeted graffiti, interracial assaults, the LA Riots of '92 is shocking proof of the volatility of our moment.

The questions of ethnic interaction have not been resolved. As Congressmember Maxine Waters has said, "This is a defining moment" (World News, 1992). A time likely to set into motion changes either strengthening or weakening bilingual education. This makes today important.

State and federal regulation of bilingual education programs has increased substantially over the last two decades, as have the concomitant accountability reporting required of educational entities. The knowledge of a significant disparity or mismatch of attitudes between the leaders of an educational organization, its staff, and its constituency could signify a problem within that organization. Districts could accurately determine the attitudes within their educational organization not only averting surprise conflicts but also to

creating an atmosphere of awareness which allows for the use of opinions for program planning and therefore program success.

Public attitude toward ethnic groups and, to a lesser degree, toward bilingual education, has become a dynamic issue in the United States as this century comes to a close. It may be an issue that looms larger than we would have thought before the LA Riots of 1992. For as we see and treat those different than the dominant culture so we display our intentions and our goals. Reliable information as to community opinions — especially as to where and how much they differ from the "official" internal opinion of a school district — is essential for program planning, development, and implementation.

Definition of Terms

• Bilingual education is a methodology that includes development of first- or home-language, acquisition of a target language (English), and the use of both languages in the teaching of "core" subjects such as math, science, etc. (California Department of Education, 1985; California Association for Bilingual Education, undated);

• ESL, or English as a Second Language, is usually meant as a general term inclusive certain methods of instruction, including cultural awareness. It can be considered a "structured language-acquisition program designed to teach English to students whose native language is not English" (Brière cited in Ovando & Collier, 1985, p. 3). For the purposes of this current study, however, its definition will be more narrowed to mean instruction that has both English-speaking students and non- or limited English-speaking students taught all basic subjects — reading, math, and science — in English. The teacher would speak only English. The non-English language-speaking students would be taken out of this class from time to time and given special instruction in English on how to speak, read and write in English. In other words, the basic idea is that all instruction would be in English, with additional special English language training (Sears & Huddy, 1983, p. 11C). Outside of this current study the preceding definition is often likely to be called a "pull-out" program (Lessow-Hurley 1990);

• LEP (Limited English Proficient) is the designation given to

individuals who "do not have the clearly developed English language skills of comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing necessary to receive instruction only in English at a level substantially equivalent to pupils of the same age or grade whose primary language is English" (West's, 1991. § 52163 (a)). For the purposes of this study, the LEP designation will also include non-English proficient (NEP) students as well. This is a common procedure when schools and districts report to the California Department of Education those students needing special English language programs (CBEDS, 1991).

- Maintenance bilingual education is a program in which non- or limited English-speaking and English-speaking students would be together in the same classroom and would be taught in both a Southeast Asian language and English. Half of the time the teacher would speak in the non-English language to the students, and the other half of the time English would be spoken. All their subjects — reading, math, and science — would be taught in both languages. In other words, the basic idea is that both English and non-English language-speaking students would be taught in both languages (Huddy, p. 11A). This is substantially the accepted definition of maintenance as it "refers to the preservation of a speaker's native tongue" (U.S. English: Glossary, 1990, p. 1) with "less emphasis [than transition] on exiting students from the program as soon as possible" (Ovando & Collier, p. 39);

- Mismatch means the difference in opinion or thought or

statement from one person to another or one group to another. Significance of such a mismatch is determined through statistical analysis of opinion survey results;

- Opinion, in this work, will have the definition of as found in Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 120): An "orientation or way of thinking . . . with regard to a specific issue or object," distinct from a general orientation which is an attitude "such as being 'liberal' or 'conservative'" and from belief which more relates to proper, moral, or religious behavior;

- Subgroups are the various components of a large group or entity. In this study that entity is the school district, the subgroups are represented by: administration (superintendent, school board, upper administrative officials of the district, and school principals); classified personnel (such as school and district secretaries, custodians, classroom aides, busdrivers, cooks, etc.); teachers (certificated personnel, including classroom teachers, itinerant district teachers, and certificated counseling staff); parents (are both male or female parents or adult guardians of children in the district);

- Transition, or transitional bilingual education, is [where] non- or limited-English-speaking students would be taught their basic subjects, reading, math, and science in a Southeast Asian language and would receive special instruction on how to speak, read, and write in English. As their English improves they would be taught less in the non-English language. When they had learned enough English they would switch to a regular classroom with English speaking students in

which all subjects would be taught in English. In other words, the basic idea is that a non-English language will only be used until they learn enough English to get by in a regular class (Sears & Huddy, p. 11B), is intended as a transition from a native language to English with the intent of monolingualism (Zealsko, 1991; Rivera, 1980). It is characterized by a desire to exit the students from the program based on "native-like attainment" language skills (California Department of Education, 1985).

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